



PADDLING THE KANKAKEE RIVER

KANKAKEE RIVER WATER TRAIL



GREENWAYS & BLUEWAYS
NORTHWEST INDIANA REGIONAL PLAN

greenwaysblueways.com

2011 EDITION



6100 SOUTHPORT ROAD
PORTAGE, INDIANA 46368
(219) 763-6060



Supported by the Kankakee River Basin Commission



JOIN THE GREENWAYS FOUNDATION OF INDIANA
Charitable trust working to promote the growth, enhancement and use of Indiana greenways.
greenwaysfoundation.org



JOIN THE NORTHWEST INDIANA PADDLING ASSOCIATION
Blueways Stewardship, Paddler Education, and Providing Paddling Opportunities to our Community
nwipa.org

The "Kankakee" in NW Indiana provides an 85 mile paddling experience on a nationally historic, undammed river flowing thru several state & county parks. There are few services available, and limited seasons for paddling due to flood events and hunting season, but for the moderately skilled, well-prepared paddler, the Kankakee is a great experience. Additional support services are planned in the future.

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

The Kankakee River had its beginnings 14,000-15,000 years ago as glacial ice advances underwent multiple meltings, spreading sands and silts across a 3000 square mile basin with a very flat topography. Exposed bedrock in Momence, Illinois plugged the sediment basin and kept the Kankakee from downcutting, resulting in a vast wetland and 200+ mile meandering river stretching from within a mile of the St. Joseph River in today's South Bend, Indiana to the bedrock dam in Momence. The resulting St. Joseph/Kankakee river trail became the primary route of east-west human migration for Paleo-Indians, and the subsequent Archaic, Woodland, Mississippian, and proto-historic First American cultures for over 10,000 years. French-Canadian explorers, such as Charlevoix, La Salle, Tonti, and Father Hennepin, who left a recorded history, followed the well known water passage starting in the 1680's. Throughout the 1700's, French-Canadian trappers, British military, and finally early American hunters and trappers made extensive use of the Kankakee River and wetlands. 20,000-40,000 muskrats per year were trapped between 1834-1884. 19th century hunters provided waterfowl to Chicago hotels restaurants. Hunting lodges were built in the 1870's-1900's era attracting hunting sportsmen from throughout the U.S. including President Cleveland, Teddy Roosevelt. Lew Wallace wrote *Ben Hur*, in his houseboat on the river. You are paddling on one of the most notable water trails in our continent's prehistory and history.

The glacial silts and wetland organic soils were known to be highly productive for agriculture, if drained. In the 1850's Congress granted the swamplands to the State of Indiana and drainage companies started digging the first of what would become 100's of miles of ditches throughout the basin. In 1893 the bedrock obstruction in Momence was lowered which meant the gradient of the river could be increased. The main channel of the river was straightened in 1903-1922 by dredging

across the river meanders, leaving the many oxbow lakes and isolated meanders that characterize the 90 mile corridor today. The drained bottomlands are highly productive corn, soybean, and wheat croplands today, although wet years result in flooding of the fields. A paddle trip down the Kankakee is characterized by many drainage pipes and side channels as well as the flood control levee, with significant wetland habitat preserves and restoration projects on stretches of public lands, as well as many private landowner managed habitats.

Wildlife and wetland plant habitat is excellent in the river's marsh areas. Beaver, muskrat, deer, turkey vultures, walleye, northern pike, bass, and panfish are common. The greater prairie chicken, sandhill crane, osprey and golden & bald eagles might be encountered. The channelization has decimated the mussel population, but 100 year old shells of the spike, mucket, plain pocketbook, elktoe, heelsplitter and sandshells can be seen in the walls of the levee. The river banks are filled with native mallow flowers in August.



SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS ON THE KANKAKEE

While the Kankakee is undammed, it does have potentially serious safety issues which must be considered before making a trip.

The Kankakee River Water Trail for canoes and kayaks is in its early stages of development. Some access points have steep grades. There are very few support facilities, such as washrooms, fresh water, designated portages around log jams at highway and railroad bridges, and clear signage to guide you to some obscurely located access sites. (Check nwipa.org, or obtain a good local road map from Lake, Porter, or La Porte County.) A number of improvements to the water trail will develop in upcoming years. Starting in the 2011 kickoff season for the water trail, it can be paddled by experienced paddlers until future improvements are in place.

Treefalls can clog road and railroad bridges with few portage opportunities. Call for information before a trip. Visually check the often-clogged Rte. 41 and abandoned railroad bridges south of Schneider before starting your trip. Visually check for log jams at county and state highway bridges before starting your trip. Call the Kankakee River Basin Commission 219-763-0696, for a general status report on known log jams. Report new log jams and other dangerous conditions to 219-763-0696.

If you encounter an unexpected log jam on your trip, head for the shoreline immediately to reconnoiter a safe passage, if any. Do not attempt to chance it through what you think might be a possible opening. Stop and be certain. If you guess wrong, you can put yourself and fellow paddlers at risk of capsizing and drowning.

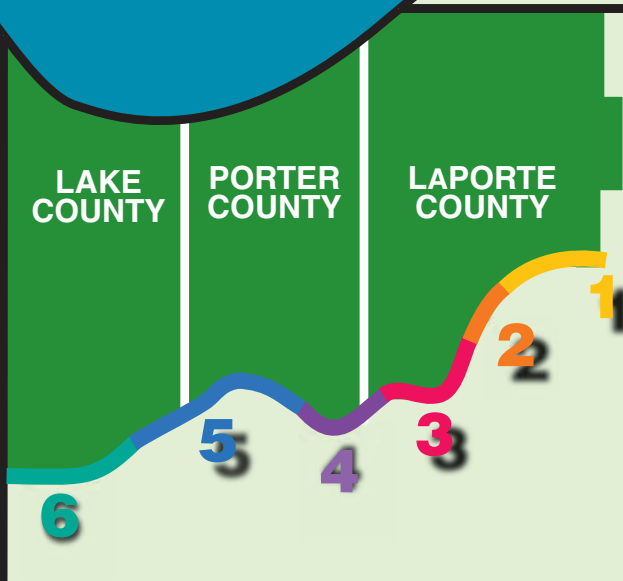
It is usually impossible to extricate yourself from being entangled in a treefall's underwater branches in a strong current. If you become trapped upstream of an impassable log jam, head for shore, make your way to a road, and phone for assistance. Plan ahead with a friend for emergency shuttle if you can't make it to an intended takeout.

The river should never be paddled at, or near, flood stage. Many bridges become impassable at various flood stages. Log jams increase the danger. Rainfall events days or weeks previous to an intended paddle can still affect river elevations for long periods afterward. Spring runoff can raise river elevations for weeks or months. Go to greenwaysblueways.com for daily USGS river level gaging information measured at U.S. Rte. 30, Dunn's Bridge, Kouts, Shelby, and Momence

The river flows through many hunting preserves. Furbearing and turkey hunting starts in mid-October. Deer, pheasant, and quail hunting starts in November. Some migratory waterfowl can be hunted starting Sept. 1. The main duck hunting season runs from mid-Oct. to mid-Dec. Dates can vary. Check www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild.

There are few services immediately available if serious problems are encountered. Know your location as accurately as possible, and always carry a cell phone.

LAKE MICHIGAN



EMERGENCY 911

Know your location before dialing

NON-EMERGENCY

Lake County Sheriff
219-755-3000

Porter County Sheriff
219-477-3000

La Porte County Sheriff
219-326-7700

Indiana State Police (Lowell)
219-696-6242

GENERAL SAFETY ADVICE

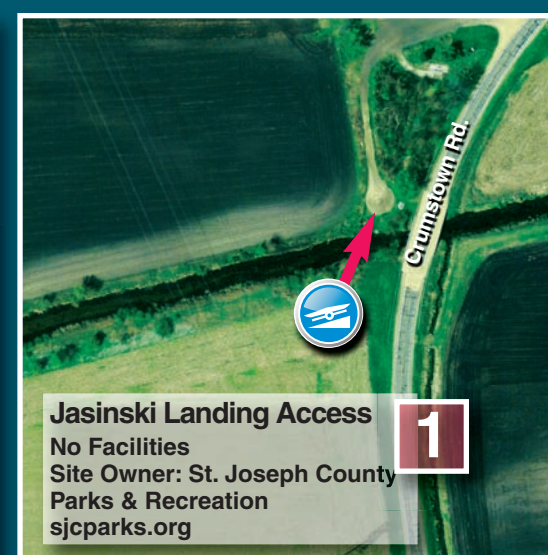
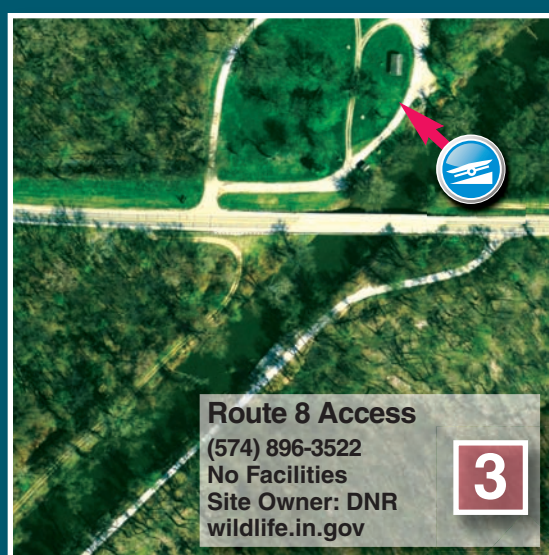
- Always wear a personal flotation device (PFD)
- Be prepared for changing weather conditions
- Keep spare clothing in a sealed bag
- Bring adequate food and water. Water is not available at most access sites
- Don't overload your canoe
- Know your abilities and physical limitations
- Leave a trip plan with friends/family

RIVER COURTESY

- Shorelines are public only at yellow shaded public properties
- All other dikes and shorelines are privately owned and should not be accessed unless in an emergency
- Don't leave litter. Be a river steward and clean up litter
- Respect the rights of anglers and hunters
- Always be courteous

BRIDGES

- Road
- Railroad
- Pedestrian



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Baum's Bridge Access 7

Baum's Bridge Inn (219) 766-0515

Five car max. May park in front of Collier Lodge. Donation to Kankakee Valley Historical Society Recommended.

Access at North Bank, East side of bridge. Steep poured concrete. Moderately difficult. Park at Collier Lodge 100 yards North of Bridge.

Route 49 Rest stop 6

Dunn's Bridge Access 5

Site Owner: Porter County Parks portercoco.org

Yellow River (English Lake) Access 4

Site Access (574) 896-3522
Site Owner: Indiana DNR wildlife.in.gov



Shelby/Route 55 Access 10

Grand Kankakee Marsh County Park Access 9

Ramsey's Landing Rest Stop No Access 8

Martis Place Restaurant Food, Rest Stop, Landing



- ### BRIDGES
- Road
 - Railroad
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River Isle Access 15

Park off road, West side
No Facilities
Site Owner: Illinois DNR

State Line Bridge Access 14

(219) 992-3019
No Services
Impassable low bridge
Site Owner: Indiana DNR

Black Oak Bayou Access "Steep Bank" 13

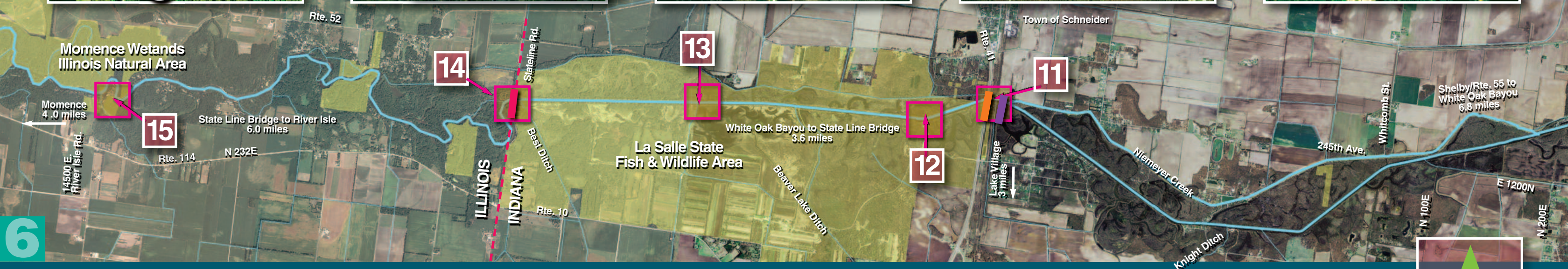
(219) 992-3019
No Facilities
Site Owner: Indiana DNR wildlife.in.gov

White Oak Bayou Access 12

(219) 992-8019
Site Owner: Indiana DNR wildlife.in.gov

ROUTE 41 POTENTIAL DANGER AREA! 11

Low railroad bridge
Low Highway bridge
Often impassible due to high water or log blockage
Drive or walk to route 41 bridge and visually check before attempting to paddle under these bridges.



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